

Democracy in the Czech Republic: an assessment of attitudes towards democracy and democratic values of the Czech population 1990-2001

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Democracy in the Czech Republic

**An Assessment of Attitudes towards Democracy and Democratic Values
of the Czech population 1990–2001**

By Zdenka Mansfeldová

Arbeitspapiere und Materialien – Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen

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Introduction

The present study focuses on the attitude of Czech citizens towards democracy and on the development of their democratic values and attitudes, on their pro-democratic values.¹ It tries to find answers to the following questions: what people associate with the term “democracy”, what experience they have with democracy and what confidence they place in a democratic system. The study concentrates on the Czech Republic, though I am aware “that a society cannot be fully understood unless it is compared with other societies”.² In this case, however, I have preferred a larger topical scope and a comparison over a longer period of time.

After 1989, a significant change in the political and socio-economic values, opinions and attitudes of the Czech population was observed, related to the structure of society, form of government, income inequalities, equitable distribution, the role of the state in the areas of economy and social security, as well as to the choice of the economic system, which can be characterised as a choice between capitalism and socialism, or rather as a choice between a market and a command economy.

In this context it would be worth examining what attention has been paid to the issue of values. In the first years of the transformation period, Czech academics did not pay much attention to this issue. This applies not only to political issues, but also to the issue of values in general and to a number of disciplines such as political science, political sociology and sociology. Surprisingly, there was almost no work concerned with values and reflections on the influence of the transformation process on value structures. Apparently, these considerations were eclipsed by the interest in economic problems and their effects. Only gradually there appeared works dealing with the transformation in the fields of mentality and values, whose authors are more often philosophers and psychologists than sociologists.

Except for international analyses (mentioned below) solely or mostly focused on the issue of values, there are hardly any projects of Czech provenance dealing with the above-mentioned issue. This particularly concerns sociology, which in the Czech Republic deals with empiric investigations into political topics, in contrast to political science. This is the conclusion reached by L. Vohralíková in her review “What Czech Sociologists Have Researched and Written in the 1990s” based on an analysis of subjects of *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, production of the sociological publishing house SLON and projects granted by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.³ In her opinion, topics prevailed that were directly or indirectly related to the fall of communism and construction of a democratic system and transition to the market economy.

¹ The term ‘pro-democratic values’ is used by e.g. Slomczynski and Kunovich. It is based on the assumption that “Democracy is usually defined in terms of norms and institutions that guarantee the basic political rights of individuals. Central to the survival of democracy is the agreement of people to abide by the rules of the democratic game”. Slomczynski, Kazimierz M. and Kunovich, Robert M.: Guest Editors’ Introduction. *International Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 2002, p. 4.

² Slomczynski and Kunovich, p. 10.

³ Vohralíková, Lenka (2002): O čem psali a bádali čeští sociologové v devadesátých letech 20. století (What Czech Sociologists Have Researched and Written in the 1990s). *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, Vol. 38, číslo 1–2, p. 139–151.

The most frequent subject of general sociological analysis was that of *Government and political power*, dealing with the change of political structure, phenomena of democracy and free elections. Political parties, institutions or electoral preferences became a subject of interest. The most frequently represented categories were as follows: *transformation* (not only in the Czech Republic, but in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole), *stratification and class structure of society*, *labour and economic life*, and *policy of welfare*.⁴

In the Czech Republic, the domain of empiric research is first of all sociology, even in the case of classical topics of political science. This results from the professional training of sociologists, which prepares them for empiric, mostly quantitative research. Political science was not founded or restored in the Czech Republic until the end of 1989⁵ and the discipline has so far been developed mostly as a theoretic one, with a certain distance towards quantitative research.

⁴ Vohralíková 2002, p.148–149.

⁵ For more details about this topic see e.g. Mansfeldová, Zdenka (2002): Political Science in the Czech Republic, in: Klingemann, Hans-Dieter / Kulesza, Ewa / Legutke, Annette (eds.), *The State of Political Science in Central and Eastern Europe*. Berlin: Edition Sigma, pp. 71–95.

Analysis of values in the Czech Republic

Values are expressed in opinions, attitudes we have towards various events and issues. Values, especially political values and attitudes, were the subject of empiric research mainly (if not exclusively) of large international comparative projects in which the Czech Republic took part. I consider it necessary to mention the most important projects carried out in this country, which were used in, and served as a basis for, many studies and publications on political values and attitudes (e.g., L. Rabušic (ed.): *České hodnoty 1991–1999*,⁶ monothematic issue of *Czech Sociological Review* 1/2001, K. Vlachová,⁷ L. Brokl and Z. Mansfeldová⁸). A large number of Czech Sociological Data Archive (SDA) data are available (in some cases international files as well) in the Sociological Data Archive at the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.⁹

World Values Surveys (WVS) is a project of comparative worldwide surveys of social, cultural and political transformations, which is now being carried out with representative samples in more than 65 countries on 6 continents. The objective of the surveys is an evaluation of the basic values and attitudes of people towards certain social phenomena. The WVS project resumes the original project of a study of values in West European countries, started in 1978 by the European Values System Study Group (EVSSG) led by Jan Kerkhofs from the University of Louvain (Leuven) in Belgium and Ruud de Moor from the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands.¹⁰ WVS has a more global character, however. The second stage, which took place in the years 1990–1993, involved about twenty other countries, including a number of post-communist states. Hans-Dieter Klingemann co-ordinated data collection in Germany, Central and a part of Eastern Europe, Ronald Inglehart co-ordinated research in non-European countries and a part of Eastern Europe. In former Czechoslovakia, the second stage of WVS took place in 1990.¹¹ The survey was carried out by the AISA agency. The third stage of the survey took place in

⁶ Rabušic, Ladislav (ed.), (2001): *České hodnoty 1991–1999 (Czech Values 1991–1999)*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita. Sborník prací Fakulty sociálních studií Brněnské univerzity (Collection of works of the Faculty of Social Studies of Brno University). Sociální studia 6. Authors: K. Vlachová, B. Řeháková, A. Burjanek, P. Mareš, D. Lužný / J. Navrátilová, M. Rabušicová / L. Rabušic.

⁷ Vlachová, Klára (1998): *Náborová krystalizace a levicové posuny (Crystallization of Opinions and Left-wing Shifts)*, in: Večerník, Jiří / Matějů, Petr (eds.), *Zpráva o vývoji české společnosti 1989–1998 (Report on Development of the Czech Society in 1989–1998)*. Praha: Academia, p. 247–268. Vlachová deals with the changes in values, especially in relation to the values contributing to the election of left-wing parties and left wing-right wing and liberalism-authoritarianism axes.

⁸ Brokl, Lubomír / Mansfeldová, Zdenka (2002): *Místo České republiky v demokratické Evropě (The Position of the Czech Republic in Democratic Europe)*, in: Mansfeldová, Z. / Tuček, M. (ed): *Současná česká společnost. Sociologické studie*. Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, p. 216–243.

⁹ The Sociological Data Archive (SDA) at the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic was opened in September 1998. It provides systematic archiving of quantitative data. The main objective of SDA is to make Czech sociological data publicly available for academic, educational and other non-commercial purposes, see Krejčí, Jindřich (2002): *Access to the Czech Social Survey Data*. Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review, Vol. 38, No. 6, p. 809–828.

¹⁰ Leontiyeva, Yana (2002): *Výzkumy hodnot v ČR: World Value Surveys a European Values Study*. SDA Info, Informační bulletin Sociologického datového archivu, 1–2/2002, p. 8–10.

¹¹ This was the first collection of data in Czechoslovakia.

1998 in the Czech Republic, once again carried out by AISA agency. This survey was organised by Z. Mansfeldová from the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The questionnaire of this third stage survey also included questions related to the level of tolerance of various social groups and the perception of democracy, authoritarianism and corruption.

European Values Study (EVS) was carried out in ten West-European countries for the first time in 1981. In the Czech Republic, this project was implemented for the first time in 1991 by a team of the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague and SC&C agency. The third stage of EVS surveys took place in 1999, carried out by the Faculty of Social Studies of the Masaryk University, Brno and the SC&C agency. The EVS project was focused more on the issues of religion and religiousness and social issues.¹²

New Democracies Barometer (NDB) is a project founded by a Vienna association, the Paul Lazarsfeld Gesellschaft, in 1991 to monitor public opinion trends in Central and Eastern Europe (in 11 countries). The aim of the project is to find out how behaviour and attitudes of post-communist countries' citizens have changed in relation to their increasing experience with democracy and market economy. Five stages of the project were carried out: 1991, Winter 1992/93, Winter 1993/94, Autumn 1995, Winter/Spring 1998. The basic set of questions concerned economic behaviour and economic expectations, political values, poverty and demographic indicators. Data were collected by GfK, Praha¹³ agency in the Czech Republic (1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, and 1998).¹⁴

In 1990–1997 **Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (CEEB)** research was carried out to monitor attitudes towards the changes in politics and economics and towards the EU in Central and East-European countries. This representative survey was organised once a year in as many as 20 countries of the region. Czechoslovakia, later the Czech Republic, took part in all the surveys. The main issue was attitudes towards reforms in the field of democracy and economy, media, perceiving of Europe and European Union, trust in NATO and knowledge of foreign languages.

International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), which has existed since 1983 and which is a continuing program of cross-national collaboration on surveys devoted to various topics important in the social sciences, has been also carried out in the Czech Republic since 1991. The programme supporter is the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Some modules contain questions related to the citizens' attitudes to civil liberties, social inequality, social welfare and economic policy of the government (e.g. in 1996 there was the *Role of Government III* module).

The main goal of the comparative research project on the **Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe**¹⁵ is to analyse the current state of consolidation of the

¹² See Rabušic, Ladislav (ed.), (2001): *České hodnoty 1991–1999*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita. Sborník prací Fakulty sociálních studií Brněnské univerzity. Sociální studia 6 and several articles.

¹³ Krejčí, Jindřich (2000). Projekt New Democracies Barometer: Analýza dat prostřednictvím Internetu (Data Analysis by means of the Internet), SDA Info, Informační bulletin Sociologického datového archivu, 1/2000, p. 1.

¹⁴ NDB I. and NDB II. were organised in the whole of Czechoslovakia, nevertheless the data can be used for the Czech Republic and for the Slovak Republic separately.

¹⁵ Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe 1998–2001: A Fifteen Country Study (Continuation of the 1990–92 Post-Communist Publics Study in Eleven Countries) coordinated by

newly implemented democracies in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A key criterion for evaluating democratic consolidation is the emergence of a political culture which is congruent to the democratic structures created. After a decade of personal experience with the new political and economic systems, the most interesting question refers to the effects of this specific experience on the formation of political culture. The *Consolidation of Democracy* project was carried out in Czechoslovakia in 1990 and in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic in 2001. In 1990 data in Czechoslovakia were gathered by the Institute for Public Opinion Poll (IVVM) – B. Jungmann, J. Mišovič, M. Rezková, J. Hartl.¹⁶ In 2001, the data in the Czech and Slovak Republics were gathered by T.N. Sofres-Factum agency, supervised by Z. Mansfeldová (Institute of Sociology, Academy of the Sciences of the Czech Republic) in the Czech Republic, and by O. Gyarfasová (Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava) in Slovakia. H.-D. Klingemann from Social Science Centre Berlin was instrumental in carrying out the second stage in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The published works based upon the above data were mostly aimed at questions of the legitimacy of democratic system, acquisition of democratic values, confidence in democratic institutions, democratic values, and electoral behaviour, attitudes towards democracy and emerging cleavages. There were sporadic attempts at a use of a different conceptual frame. Examples are articles written by L. Rabušic¹⁷ and B. Řeháková. She used Inglehart's well-known conception of the measuring of the opposite poles materialism and post-materialism and applied the typology of Materialists, Postmaterialists and "Mixed" types to the Czech data from the European Values Survey. She attempted an assessment of the changes in these values between 1991 and 1999 and its representation in the Czech population in relation to age, education and subjective social position.¹⁸

The common feature of all the above-mentioned projects is that their first stages took place at the beginning of the nineties, when citizens had only a short experience with democracy, democratic procedures and institutions, and they were not yet completely under the pressure of the burden of "triple transformation", and great expectations were not significantly modified by reality. By the end of the nineties, when the second stages of most surveys were carried out, citizens had already had experience with several elections, changes of cabinets, new forms of interest mediation, but also with political and economic scandals, new social inequalities, unemployment, increasing crime etc. All these facts could undoubtedly cause changes in opinions and political attitudes of citizens and affect their attitude towards democracy. The problem of most analyses is that they cover a time frame of about ten years. How to overcome this difference? We rely on the fact that people have accumulated experience and this is reflected by their atti-

Edeltraud Roller, Dieter Fuchs, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Bernhard Wessels (Social Science Research Center Berlin, WZB), and János Simon (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest).

¹⁶ This information is from Barnes, Samuel H. / Simon, János, eds. (1998): *The Post-communist Citizen*. Erasmus Foundation Budapest and Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

¹⁷ Rabušic, L. (2000): Je česká společnost „postmaterialistická“?. In: *Sociologický časopis*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 3–22.

¹⁸ Řeháková, B. (2001): Změny hodnot v České republice a Inglehartova hodnotová typologie (Change of Values in the Czech Republic and Inglehart's Value Typology), in Rabušic Ladislav (ed.), (2001): *České hodnoty 1991–1999*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita. Sborník prací Fakulty sociálních studií Brněnské univerzity. Sociální studia 6, p. 47–71.

tudes and values. In some cases data of public opinion polls for this period are used. The present study is based mainly on the surveys of *Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe*.¹⁹

Is democracy an ideal system? What do people understand by the term “democracy”?

Speaking generally about what political system citizens prefer, we will find out (and this is not very surprising) that they prefer democracy and they deem it the best form of government. We asked whether people prefer a democratic or a non-democratic model of government, and 70.2% considered democracy a better form of government (2001). 17.7% of respondents could imagine another,²⁰ better alternative. Similarly, other analyses, which asked the question in another way, showed a support of democracy as an ideal form of government.

People who think that democracy is the best form of government (in a simplified fashion we can call them democrats) prefer freedom to equality, democracy in their understanding is connected first of all with civil liberties, higher decentralization of decision-making processes, higher tolerance in the field of morality and sex, equal protection of the law, equal rights of women, multi-party system (90.4%), improvement of economic conditions (see Table 1). They consider elections the best way to choose members of government and state authorities (73.2%) and they unequivocally stress the necessity of parliament for the functioning of society.

Those who answer that there is another, better form of government than democracy prefer equality to freedom; they link democracy with a higher social equality; however, they connect democracy with political liberties at a significantly lower level than democrats. They also link democracy with tolerance in the field of personal morals and with a multi-party system (although less than democrats do).

This also corresponds to the idea as to which problems can be solved well by a democratically chosen government and which by a non-democratic government. Citizens expect that a democratically chosen government would be able to create better conditions for citizens to participate in decision-making processes, for education, in solving economic issues and in representation of the interests of both individuals and various groups of citizens. They expect far less from a democratic government concerning the issues related to criminality and safety of citizens in general, control of the black market and corruption prevention, and in solving unemployment issues. In short, in the areas where they expect the repressive parts or paternalistic role of the state to work, citizens

¹⁹ The size of the sample in the Czech Republic in November 1990 was 679 and in March 2001 1002 respondents.

²⁰ In the World Value Survey (1998), 86.4% of citizens of the Czech Republic opined for a democratic form of government, while only 8.8% were more or less against this form of government when asked “*which political system citizens prefer*”. Similarly, 84.8% of citizens agreed and 8.5 % disagreed with the thesis that “*Democracy may have problems but it is better than any other form of government*”. See Brokl, Lubomír / Mansfeldová, Zdenka (1999): Civil Society and Democratic Orientation in Central Europe: The Case of the Czech Republic. Paper prepared for the Conference on Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe. Part III: Civil Society, held 28–29 June 1999 at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute, Florence, Italy.

are less sure these can be better solved by a democratic government, though they do not explicitly prefer non-democratic forms of government.

Tab. 1: Democracy as an ideal and what people understand by the term democracy (in %)

Significance of democracy	Democracy is the best form of government*		There is another form of government that is better*	
	A lot	somewhat	A lot	somewhat
a. Political liberties e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of association	82.0	15.8	51.7	34.9
b. Greater social equality	23.9	30.3	15.4	36.9
c. Ability to make many political and administrative decisions at the local and regional level	38.1	43.2	20.8	40.9
d. Less corruption and less selling of influence	24.7	26.1	28.9	13.4
e. Freedom in moral and sexual matters	37.1	34.6	31.5	32.9
f. Equality before the law	49.8	29.8	32.2	24.8
g. Government control of banks and large private enterprises	20.5	27.1	22.1	19.5
h. Equal rights for women	43.2	37.6	33.6	26.2
i. More jobs, less unemployment	22.2	28.8	26.2	15.4
j. That economic conditions improve	34.1	34.7	22.1	24.2
k. Multi-party system	67.5	22.9	41.6	34.2

Data source: Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe 1998–2001: A Fifteen Country Study (Continuation of the 1990–92 Post-Communist Publics Study in Eleven Countries) coordinated by Edeltraud Roller, Dieter Fuchs, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Bernhard Wessels (Social Science Research Center Berlin, WZB), and János Simon (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest) (hereafter: Consolidation).

* Difference to 100% includes the category of those who do not know or do not answer.

A high degree of support for democratic liberties in 1990 is worth noticing. This can be explained by the experience with 40 years of an authoritarian regime and by a certain revolutionary euphoria. However, one should ask whether and to what extent democratic values existed in the population before the fall of communism. The results of the “Citizens’ Attitudes towards Politics” analysis of May 1968 showed that in the relaxed atmosphere of the so-called Prague Spring citizens expressed their views in favour of traditional parliamentary democracy in the sense that parties were to compete in elec-

tions for power in the state, free propagation of non-socialist opinions, rights of minorities to stand for their opinions in public, tolerance etc.²¹

If 70% of respondents in the Czech Republic support democracy as an ideal, one should ask what they understand by democracy and what kind of democracy they want.

People have different ideas of democracy and they attribute different meanings to this term, but in all cases it is a complex conception that cannot be expressed in a few words. Their conceptions have also changed in the course of ten years of transformation. Therefore the respondents were given a list of various connotations attributed to democracy and asked to say how far, in their opinion, they associate a given connotation with their understanding of democracy (scale: strongly – partly – a little – absolutely not). The further procedure consists of work with weighted means of categories *associate* (strongly / partly) and *not associate* (a little / absolutely not). This can give us a very rough picture of what people in both republics associate with the meaning of democracy and how far this understanding has changed in the course of transformation (1990, 2001). It follows from Table 2 that political parties and multi-party systems are still the terms people associate most with democracy. This corresponds to János Simon's observations of the early 90s.²²

²¹ Brokl, Lubomír / Seidlová, Adéla / Bečvář, Josef / Rakušanová, Petra (1999): *Postoje československých občanů k demokracii v roce 1968* (Czechoslovak Citizens' Attitudes Towards Democracy in 1968). Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, Working Papers 99:8, p. 59.

²² "...they uniformly understand political freedom, equal rights before the law and multi-party system to be a part of the concept of democracy..." In: Simon, János: *Popular Conception of Democracy in Post-communist Europe*, in: Barnes, Samuel H. / Simon, János (eds.): *The Postcommunist Citizen*. Erasmus Foundation Budapest and Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1998, p. 81.

Tab. 2: How much do you associate the following statement with democracy?

	CR 1990		CR 2001	
Strong:	Political liberties e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of association	1.19	Political liberties e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of association	1.32
1 – 1.5	Multi-party system	1.39		
	Equality before the law	1.43		
Medium:	Ability to make political and administrative decisions at local and regional levels (decentralization)	1.69	Multi-party system	1.55
1.6 – 1.9	Equal rights for women	1.83	Right to participate	1.72
			Ability to make political and administrative decisions at local and regional levels (decentralization)	1.85
Weak:	Improvement of economic conditions	1.97	Equality before the law	1.91
more than	Government control of banks and large private enterprises	2.15	Equal rights for women	1.93
1.9	Freedom in moral and sexual matters	2.23	Freedom in moral and sexual matters	2.05
	Less corruption and less selling of influence	2.24	Improvement of economic conditions	2.18
	Greater social equality	2.33	Greater social equality	2.39
	More jobs, less unemployment	2.52	Less corruption and less selling of influence	2.47
			More jobs, less unemployment	2.52
			Government control of banks and large private enterprises	2.54

1= strongly, 2= partly, 3= a little, 4= absolutely not

Some characteristics, e.g. decentralization, seem to lose their significance, but this possibly results from the fact that decentralization of political and administrative decisions have begun to work in practice and to some extent this has become a matter of course.²³

If we look at the individual items, we can see that they can be divided into those more appropriate to the concepts of democracy, called “DEMO 1”, which covered:

- a) Political liberties e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of association;
- c) Decentralized decision-making;
- f) Equal rights before the law;
- h) Equal rights for women;
- k) Multi-party system;

and those which characterize the way a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state works rather than democracy – called “DEMO 2”, which covered:

- b) Greater social equality;
- d) Less corruption and less selling of influence;
- e) Freedom in moral and sexual matters;
- g) Government control of banks and large private enterprises;
- i) More jobs, less unemployment;
- j) That economic conditions improve.

When we calculate the DEMO 1 index (see Table 3), ranging from the value 1=max. association, to 4=min., then the results show that the concept of democracy was clearer at the beginning of the nineties (1.49) than in 2001 (1.68).

On the other hand, the DEMO 2 index²⁴ shows that after twelve years the citizens have a clearer understanding of what should not be associated with democracy (2.41) than of what democracy is (2.21).

Tab. 3: Means of the index DEMO 1 and DEMO 2

Means of the index	1990	2001
DEMO 1	1.49	1.68
DEMO 2	2.21	2.41

Data source: Consolidation. Calculation B. Řeháková

People now associate (differences are statistically significant) what we would call “a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state” to a lesser degree with democracy.

²³ The transformation of the subnational government, its decentralization, deregulation, and particularly the introduction of territorial self-government, was an essential task in the process of re-building the political and administrative system after 1989. Two stages of the reform process can be roughly distinguished: the first one took place in the early 1990s when the constitutional foundations of the subnational government were laid down and the local (municipal) tier was put in place. The second one followed at the end of 1990s and in the early 2000s when the reform also embraced the intermediary tier of government. See Illner p.62, in Illner, Michal (2003): *The Czech Republic 1990–2001. Successful reform at the municipal level and a difficult birth of the intermediary government*. In: Baldersheim, H. / Illner, M. / Wollmann, H. (eds.), *Local Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, p. 62–90.

²⁴ Item e) ‘Freedom in moral and sexual matters’ was omitted to calculate the index since this item decreases the scale reliability.

At the same time they have become less sure of what democracy is, as if being confronted with reality they ask themselves whether “this is really democracy”.

A factor analysis provides a more complex view of what people associate with the term “democracy”. In 1990 we obtained 2 factors explaining 45% variance. The first, more significant, factor, which can be called “a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state” according to the items it was filled with (for more detail see the appendix), explained 27% variance. The second factor, which could be called “freedom and plurality”, explained another 18% variance. In 2001, the idea of what democracy is had become more compact, and both the factors explained 54% variance. The first, more significant factor, which can be called “equality, a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state”, explains 35% variance, the second one, which explains 19% variance, can be called “freedom and plurality”. In comparison with 1990, the term of democracy is also more associated with equal rights before the law.

The relationship to democracy, generally formulated as a support of democracy as an ideal, can be demonstrated in greater detail by the relationship to:

- legitimacy of government
- need for the existence of parliament
- need for the existence of political parties
- preference of a multi-party system
- tolerance of repressive methods

Most citizens thought and still think (see Table 4) that elections are the best way to choose a government and the authorities of the country. From 1990 to 2001, the number of supporters of this opinion fell by 11%. It allows us to believe that such a development is a reflection of a repeated experience of a “stalemate” after elections and the difficulties in forming a minority government.

Tab. 4: Do you think that elections are the best way to choose a government and the authorities of the country or do you disagree with this statement? (in %)

	1990	2001
Yes, they are the best way	83.5	72.4
No, they are not the best way	16.5	27.6

Those who agreed that elections are the best way to choose a government and the authorities of the country were those who associated democracy with (in both observed periods)

- political liberties, e.g. freedom of speech and freedom of association;
- equal rights before the law;
- a multi-party system;

and also, though less frequently, with

- decentralized decision-making;
- state control of banks and large private enterprises;
- equal rights for women;
- improvement of economic conditions.

Similarly, as in the case of the significance of elections, most citizens thought and still think that in order for things to go well we need a parliament (Table 5), though the feeling of the need for the parliament has weakened, by 24.5%. This could be explained by a very low level of confidence in parliament, in the region of 20% in the long term (this issue is discussed in greater detail below).

Tab. 5: Do you think that in order for things to go well, we need a parliament? (in %)

	1990	2001
We need a parliament	87.5	63.0
We could do without it	12.5	37.0

Data source: Consolidation

These results can be compared with other surveys as well. In 1998, the World Values Survey analysed non-democratically oriented, autocratic attitudes. One of the questions posed was as follows: “*a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections*”. 78.4% of citizens took a negative stand on such a leader, while 14.8% would have supported him. Another international research New Democracies Barometer gave a similar result, showing that a strong leader, who can make decisions and solve problems fast, would have been preferred to parliament and elections by 13% of Czech respondents in 1998.²⁵ In comparison with other monitored Central and East-European countries, the support for a strong leader was lowest in the Czech Republic (see Table 6).

Tab. 6: Support for a strong leader (agreement in %)

Country	Winter 92/93	Winter 93/94	1995	1998
Bulgaria	66	45	22	29
Poland	31	35	33	28
Romania	27	30	29	27
Slovakia	24	24	19	23
Hungary	27	18	21	18
Slovenia	(71)	42	29	14
Czech	24	16	12	13
CEE means	38	30	23	22

Source: Rose, Richard / Haerpfer, Christian (1998): Trends in Democracies and Markets: New Democracies Barometer 1991–98. Studies in Public Policy Number 308, Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy

How do citizens view the need for political parties? A rough survey of the development is given in Table 7 below.

²⁵ Rose, Richard / Haerpfer, Christian (1998): Trends in Democracies and Markets: New Democracies Barometer 1991–98. Studies in Public Policy Number 308, Glasgow: Centre for the Study of Public Policy, p. 37.

Tab. 7: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements (agreement in %)

Statement	1990	2001
a) We need political parties if we want democratic development	87.3	81.2
b) I can't see any difference between the existing parties	26.1	40.4
c) Parties provide opportunity to participate in political activities	86.1	70.1
d) Parties only serve their leaders' interest	34.3	66.9

Data source: Consolidation

Today the need for political parties and their role, expressed by the total index (PARTIES), is viewed in a worse light compared to 1990 (see Table 8).

Tab. 8: Means of index PARTIES

Country	1990	2001
CR	1.18	1.38

1=positive relationship to political parties, 2=negative relationship to political parties

Data source: Consolidation. Calculation B. Řeháková

The value of the index ranges from 1 to 2, the lower the score, the better the opinion of the need for political parties and their role.²⁶ The opinion that parties only serve their leaders' interests and provide fewer opportunities for citizens' participation in political activities increased significantly. Undoubtedly this response reflects the respondents' experience of political parties quarrelling with each other, of personal animosities prevailing over platform interest, and personalities of party leaders becoming a dividing line between the parties. In 2001, a certain role was possibly also played by the existence of a so-called opposition agreement between the ruling Social Democrats (ČSSD) and the strongest right-wing opposition party of Civic Democrats (ODS). It follows from other surveys that citizens felt ambivalent about this; for some people it led to a disappointment in politics and political parties. The Czech population was not mature enough to accept something that looked like a "large coalition".

In spite of the increasing reservations about political parties, the citizens still share the opinion that a multi-party system is better for their country (see Table 9), and, as mentioned above, they associate the multi-party system with democracy.

Tab. 9: Which do you think would be better for your country? (in %)

	1990	2001
One-party system	7.7	12.1
Multi-party system	92.3	87.9

Data source: Consolidation.

²⁶ To calculate the index, the items were additionally decoded so that the positive replies should have value 1 and the negative ones value 2.

The level of tolerance of repressive methods also proved democratic values. After the fall of the authoritative system by the end of 1989, citizens were very sensitive about the use of force against demonstrations and about the use of a repressive apparatus. Within the following 11 years this attitude changed and the citizens seem to be more tolerant of the establishing or keeping of order by the use of repressive methods. This especially concerns the control of demonstrations and the meting out of harsher sentences to protestors who disregard the police. The acceptance of such methods in the Czech Republic is higher now than it was then (see Table 10). However, this does not mean that people want the system of police surveillance to come back. It allows us to believe that in the Czech Republic these opinions represent a reaction to street-parties followed by destruction of property, activities of right-wing extremists and clashes of extremist groups, as well as demonstrations in 2000 during the IMF session in Prague that turned into riots. In comparison with neighbouring Slovakia, citizens do not have the experience of Metchiarism which would have led to greater vigilance in relation to the suppression of protest demonstrations.

Tab. 10: What kinds of democratic and undemocratic actions are citizens willing to accept (in %)*

Kinds of action	1990	2001
a) The police using force against demonstrators	14.9	64.3
b) Harsh sentences for protestors who disregard police	24.4	72.1
c) The government passing the law to forbid all public protest demonstrations	8.0	23.1
d) The government using troops to break strikes	4.5	18.7

* Approve strongly + approve

Data source: Consolidation.

In the Czech Republic, the fear of crime in general plays a certain role as well; public opinion polls show that from a long-term view the problem of safety and crime is felt by citizens to be one of the most acute issues.

The experience with democracy

We have discussed the topic in rather general terms so far. But what does reality look like? The reply to the question whether the democracy we have in the Czech Republic is the best form of government or whether in the Czech case there is some other, better form, differed from the one we received when we asked about democracy as an ideal. More than a third of respondents (38.3%) judged democracy to be the best form of government in the Czech Republic, but the group of those who thought that there could be some other, better alternative of the government was larger (44.3%). It should also be mentioned that there was a high proportion of those who did not know or were not able to choose any answer at all (17.4%). We should take into account that this question does not relate to an ideal, but to the judgement of the performance of democracy. This is a reflection of the disappointment following from the fact that the high expectations (whether realistic or not) which were held at the beginning of the nineties had not been fulfilled. This corresponds to the satisfaction with the way democracy works in the Czech Republic, where on a 10-point rating scale (the higher the score, the higher the

level of satisfaction) the average evaluation made 4.4 points only, while in 1990 it made 4.67 points (see Table 11). The citizens were not and are not too satisfied with the working of democracy in their own country, and the level of satisfaction has decreased.

Tab. 11: Satisfaction with working of democracy

Year	Mean
1990	4.67
2001	4.40

Data source: Consolidation.

In 2001, those who considered themselves to be left-wing were less satisfied with the development of democracy in the Czech Republic. These people more often hold the opinion that Communism was a good idea which was merely badly realised. From the viewpoint of their party orientation, they are supporters of the parties to the left of centre, first of all KSČM (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, the Czech communist party, for which 80% of dissatisfied persons cast their vote). Amongst supporters or potential voters of SPR-RSČ (Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, a far right-wing party) there are also more dissatisfied than satisfied persons, though Republicans did not at that time belong to parliamentary parties, and their electoral preferences stayed below the level of eligibility for a long time. Hence we can suggest that dissatisfied citizens turned to other parties that had a chance to represent their interests.²⁷

Satisfaction with the working of democracy is linked to the general level of satisfaction with the political development, and it is among the factors reflected in the evaluation of the whole transformation period and in the comparison of expectations and reality (see Table 12).

Table 12: Since the end of communist regime things have been getting on (in %)

	C 90	C 01
Better than I expected	11.1	5.5
Worse than I expected	32.8	51.3
As I expected	21.4	8.3
Some things better, some worse	34.6	34.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Data source: Consolidation.

When comparing the data of 1990 and 2001, we can see a certain disappointment at the development and the share of those disappointed at the way the situation in the country has developed has increased. The data show that people had expected an easier course

²⁷ Those dissatisfied with the development of democracy in the Czech Republic also include more than three quarters of those who would probably not vote or would not be able to choose any party at all. This also corresponds to the results obtained after the 2002 Parliamentary elections, for more details see Seidlová, A. / Červenka, J. / Kunštát, D.: *Voliči a nevoliči – The Comparative Study of Electoral System*, in: Linek, L. / Mrklas, L. / Seidlová, A. / Sokol, P. (eds.) (2003): *Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny 2002*. Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, p. 98–111.

of transformation and that confrontation with the reality led them to a more pessimistic view on the transformation development. To my mind, a certain role is also played by their general personal situation: people found out that if they worked better it would not automatically lead to the growth of their living standard in the context of the dynamics of European and world economy, and it would not contribute to the maintenance of such a trend either. They also realized that a change of the legal system would not automatically mean the observance of the law.

The above-mentioned disappointment can be also intensified by the increased feeling that society is ruled mostly for the benefit of a few interest groups, and far less for the benefit of all the citizens. Clientelism of political parties, a growing interconnection of politics and economy and the influence of strong lobbying groups are reflected in this evaluation. (see Table 13)

Table 13: For whose benefit is society ruled (in %)

	1990	2001
For the benefit of the majority of people in our country	53.2	24.3
For the benefit of a few interest groups	46.8	75.7

Data source: Consolidation.

In spite of such pessimistic evaluation of the development and disappointed expectations, people do not often think about emigration. When they were asked, if they had a chance to choose a country to live, whether they would choose the Czech Republic, 80.2% of respondents answered they would definitely or probably like to live in the country they were living at present; in comparison with the data of 1990 this figure increased. This corresponds to the data obtained in domestic opinion polls and to the low interest in work in EU member-countries, though the latter one concerns rather the economic interest.

The attitude to democracy, satisfaction with the development of democracy and with one's own situation in a new system also correlate with the attitude towards the individual responsibility for one's own life, with priority given to self-responsibility over responsibility of the state. "I will take care of myself by myself" – this is one of the new values which has gradually become part of our value system. The opposition of the opinion that citizens are individually responsible for their own living standard versus the attitude placing responsibility for the citizens' living standard on the state has undergone a considerable change within the studied transformation decade. The data deserve more attention because they relate to the changes of citizens' value orientation and attitudes, which represent a basis of democracy as a state of society.

In 1990, more than half (57.2%) the citizens (to a varying extent) wanted to exercise their own responsibility for their life and living standard, while less than half (42.8%) placed this responsibility on the state. The citizens who preferred their own responsibility suggested at the beginning of transformation that in contrast to the previous communist period hard work would become evident directly in their increasing living standard and that they would be able to take care of themselves by themselves. To a large extent this also resulted from revolutionary euphoria and from a reaction against the state dirigism of the communist period. Citizens suggested they had their living standards in

their own hands without any state redistribution and levelling. In 2001, less than a third (29.3%) of citizens acknowledged their own responsibility, and almost two thirds (65.8%) relied on the state. At the end of an institutional democratic transformation, we have thus recorded a trend towards an inverse change in the orientation of attitudes, in contrast with the beginning of transformation.²⁸

It would be wrong to interpret these results as showing helplessness and civic immaturity of the population who rely on the state as indicating a debacle of the original liberal orientation and consolidation of parliamentary democracy and as a shift towards the values of a corporative or authoritarian political system. As we have shown at the beginning, people still deem democracy to be the best form of government, which is closely related to a preference of their individual responsibility to their dependence upon the state; but it was often difficult for them to cope with a loss of the securities of living and with a situation they were not ready for, e.g. to bear the effects of wrong decisions. This is related to the issue of the evaluation of performance of democracy and authorities and support for democracy.

Political support

The conception of this part is based on a study written by Jacques Thomassen and Jan van Deth²⁹ who used the processed international data of the first stage of the research project *Consolidation of Democracy*. Thomassen and van Deth tried to answer the question: “Does the politically active stratum represent people who are dissatisfied with government policy, with political leaders, and perhaps even with the democratic institutions and regimes? Or do they represent the people who are inclined to support the new leadership and the new regime?”³⁰ As to the government, they suggest that

*governments in new democracies cannot afford to be ineffective, on pain of being punished with an almost immediate loss of support. From this perspective, governments in the new Central and Eastern European democracies are faced with an almost hopeless task. A superficial observation might lead to the conclusion that the new regimes started out with large credits. People were obviously fed up with the old regimes, not only because they were repressive but also because they were visibly ineffective compared to the economic development in Western countries.*³¹

The initial widespread support was based first and foremost on expectations; there was no other choice at the beginning of the nineties. Ten years later this support was strongly affected by experience with the work of a new system and democratic institutions and authorities.

²⁸ World Values Survey brought similar results, showing more than a half (51.7%) respondents in 1990, who preferred their own responsibility for their own life and independence on the state to various extent (a five-point scale), and 47.6% respondents, who laid this responsibility on the state.

²⁹ According to Thomassen, Jacques / van Deth, Jan: Political Involvement and Democratic Attitudes, in: Barnes, Samuel H. / Simon, János (eds.), *The Postcommunist Citizen*. Erasmus Foundation Budapest and Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1998, pp. 139–164.

³⁰ Thomassen and van Deth, p. 149.

³¹ Thomassen and van Deth, p. 149.

In their general conception of political support Thomassen and van Deth proceeded from D. Easton. According to Easton, the major objects of political support are the authorities, the political institutions, and the political regime. Acceptance of authorities, political institutions and political regime are deemed to be the main component of political support. Support for a political system created in this way enables us to differentiate: “A negative judgement about the performance of the government will not immediately be translated into a negative judgement on the political institutions and the political regime”.³²

The main components of political support are deemed to be an acceptance of authorities, political institutions and political regime. On the basis of such a construction, indexes for individual items of “political support” can be computed. The values of individual items are presented in the table “Effectiveness of Government and Political Support” in the appendix. These indices are of a higher informative value than questions usually asked in public opinion polls on confidence in government and parliament, which inquire about confidence but which actually trace the evaluation of the performance of these democratic institutions. A number of studies work only with such simplified data. Respondents do not usually reply to the wording of the question about an institution; rather, they voice their opinions about the people who are acting in the institution. People perceive the abstract term of an institution, processes and mechanisms in concrete terms, they perceive their human actors, their activities; such an evaluation of the human actors, which is often different from the way they would evaluate the institution itself, is frequently identified with an evaluation of the institution and is deemed to be an evaluation of the institution. Such insufficient differentiation and confusion can even result in contradictory evaluations, or misinterpretations.

The method chosen by Thomassen and van Deth enables us to avoid such mistakes. Indexes were construed on a basis of the following items (but calculated on the 1–4 scale basis by B. Řeháková, instead of on the 10 point scale).³³

Authorities. The index is calculated on the basis of the following items:

- satisfaction with the present government
- confidence in the government as an institution
- confidence in the present ruling party
- confidence in the present government and in what the government does

Institutions. The index is calculated on the basis of the following questions:

- confidence in political parties
- confidence in the parliament
- confidence in the police
- confidence in the Army

Regime. The index is calculated on the basis of the following questions:

- satisfaction with the way democracy works

³² Thomassen and van Deth, p. 151.

³³ Mansfeldová, Zdenka / Řeháková, Blanka (2001): Understanding of Democracy. Paper prepared for the workshop “Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Czech and Slovak Comparative Perspective”, organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs and Slovak Political Science Association, December 14th, 2001, Bratislava.

- need for a parliament for things to go well in the society
- the Czech Republic should develop in the way typical of Western countries – Western type of democracy
- need for political parties
- preference for a one- or multi-party system

Table 14 gives the the values of indexes.

Tab. 14: Mean of indexes Authorities, Institutions and Regime

	1990	2001
Authorities ¹	2.50	2.99
Institutions ²	2.82	2.93
Regime ³	1.22	1.30

Data source: Consolidation.

¹ Values 1 – 4, the lower the value, the higher the level of trust

² Values 1 – 4, the lower the value, the higher the level of trust

³ Values 1 – 2, the lower the value, the higher the level of trust

The comparison of all three indexes shows that at the beginning of the transformation period citizens had a higher level of confidence in *Authorities*, in government and the ruling party than in *Institutions* and *Regime*. This is quite understandable because the government was elected in the first free elections and consisted to a large extent of Ministers from the Civic Forum, a movement which embodied rejection of the Communist regime. Voters expected the government to implement the policy they had chosen in the elections. The confidence in institutions, lower at the time, meant confidence in the institutions which were being constituted (the eruptive rise of new political parties), in an institution which was looking for its right functions and significance (parliament) and in institutions which used to be associated with the repressive apparatus (police and army).

Confidence in the government as an institution and as a ruling party (or government coalition) and satisfaction with the government, expressed by index *Authorities*, was reduced considerably and in comparison to the other two indexes its decrease was the biggest. Confidence in *Institutions* dropped slightly, though it was higher than confidence in *Authorities*. I would like to comment on confidence in parliament. The low confidence in parliament in the Czech Republic is usually related to a low level of civic consciousness and it is interpreted as a threat to democracy. In spite of everything, democracy has worked and citizens create a new parliament in each election. Low confidence of citizens in parliament is a general phenomenon, while a comparatively high trust was an exception at the beginning of transformation in 1990.

The higher confidence declared by citizens in 1990 was caused by the fact that after the fall of Communism and at the beginning of transformation deputies expressed a comparatively unified, undifferentiated common interest: their own and citizens' interest, bound by euphoria and an emotional wave of anti-communism. Deputies, or at least their majority, appeared quite trustworthy to most citizens. However, after the establishment of the party system in the process of democratic transformation, only those deputies who belong to the party he votes for, or the deputies he elects directly, are credible to a citizen-voter. Deputies from other parties, deputies the citizen did not elect, do not appear trustworthy to him. Logically, this makes most deputies of the parliament

untrustworthy for a majority of citizens, and untrustworthiness of the “parliament” is therefore a natural phenomenon, which actually expresses the core of democratic parliamentarism.

The third index *Regime* shows confidence in the democratic political regime, satisfaction with the development of democracy and with the direction of the country towards the type of western democracies. This index also recorded a slight fall after ten years, though it corresponds to the transition from enthusiasm to a real evaluation.

The results of the above indexes enable us to formulate the conclusion that in spite of the complex development of the first decade of the transformation period, connected with an imperfection of institutions, legal environment, privatisation scandals, and often a very difficult adaptation to new conditions on a personal level, citizens prefer democracy and democratic institutions. The results have proved that a negative evaluation of actual activities of the government or parliament does not automatically imply a negative judgement on the political institutions and the political regime. It follows from sociological surveys that citizens support democracy as an ideal form of government, though they critically judge the way democracy and its institutions work.

Conclusion

The concept of democracy has changed in the course of transformation period. People associate (differences of the values are statistically significant) what we would call “a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state” to a lesser extent, and political freedoms and a multi-party system to a larger extent with democracy. However, at the same time they have become less sure of what democracy is, as if being confronted with reality they ask themselves whether “this is really democracy”.

After initial euphoria resulting from democratic development and often unreal expectations, a certain disappointment arose. In spite of a quite critical evaluation of the development and growing scepticism towards politicians and politics (or a more realistic approach), the total support of democracy, what we could call “political support”, has not changed too much, though we know that in new democracies this support is very fragile and temporary disappointment at “policy performance” can significantly affect decision-taking processes and behaviour of citizens, which is especially obvious in electoral behaviour. The results of the parliamentary elections of June 2002 are a good example of this phenomenon.

We can state that in a number of constitutive democratic values (such as support for democracy as a system, preferences to democratic institutions and authorities, animosity against autocracy, rejection of violence and strong hand, support for lawfulness in politics) Czech society has approached Western democracies. Differences can be found at the lower level of individual responsibility for one’s own life. People mostly perceive democracy as a freedom, but they do not want to use opportunities freedom offers to solve their problems by themselves; rather, they expect a protective role of the state.

Appendices

Factor analysis of the significance of democracy³⁴

1990

The result of the factor analysis was 2 factors, which explained 44.76% variance.

The first, stronger factor, which can be called “a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state” explained 26.93% variance, and contained the following items:

- Greater social equality
- Less corruption and less selling of influence
- Government control of banks and large private enterprises
- Equal rights for women
- More jobs, less unemployment
- Improvement of economic conditions

The second factor, which could be called “freedom and plurality” explained the other 17.83% variance, and contained the items:

- Political liberties, e.g., freedom of speech, freedom of association
- Ability to make political and administrative decisions at local and regional levels
- Freedom in moral and sexual matters
- Equality before the law
- Multi-party system

2001

The idea of democracy became more compact, and both factors explained 54.24% variance. In comparison with 1990, the term ‘democracy’ is moreover associated to a larger degree with equal rights before the law.

The first, more significant factor, which could be called “equality, a state that respects the rule of law and a welfare state” explains 34.83% variance and contains the items:

- Greater social equality
- Less corruption and less selling of influence
- Equality before the law
- Government control of banks and large private enterprises
- Equal rights for women
- More jobs, less unemployment
- Improvement of economic conditions

The second factor, which explains 19.41% variance, can be called “freedom and plurality” and contains the items:

- Political liberties, e.g. freedom of speech, freedom of association

³⁴ Calculated by B. Řeháková.

- Ability to make political and administrative decisions at local and regional levels
- Freedom in moral and sexual matters
- Multi-party system

“Effectiveness of Government and Political Support” in the Czech Republic³⁵

Authorities:	1990	2001
Satisfaction with the present government***	5.3	3.9
Confidence in the present ruling party** 1)	57	70
Confidence in the biggest opposition party** 2)	70	73
Trust in Prime minister**	35	-
Trust in president**	28	-

Institutions:	1990	2001
Political parties**	68	80
Parliament**	61	75
Police**	81	54
Army**	59	54

Regime:	1990	2001
Satisfaction with democracy***	4.5	4.4
Agreement with free election *	78	72
We need a parliament*	86	63
Country needs western-like democracy*	74	65
We need political parties*	86	81
Multi-party system (% multi-party system)	91	88

* percent agree

** percent little or no confidence

*** mean scores on the scale from “dissatisfied” (1) to “satisfied” (10).

1) in 2001 the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)

2) in 2001 the Civic Democratic Party (ODS)

³⁵ According to Thomassen, *ibidem*, p. 159, data from 2001 added by Mansfeldová.

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